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The Nazi Occupation, 1941-1944

This is UNEVALUATED Information

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A. The Situation in Brief

1. In their "Drang Nach Osten", Nazi Germany seized Lithuania with every intention of including it within an enlarged, victorious German nation. (Herr Von Ribbentrop in a speech in Riga in 1942, stated that the Baltic peoples would have to surrender their countries to Germans and that they would be resettled in territory behind the Kama River, a tributary of the Volga.) They followed a policy of splitting the ethnic groups within conquered countries, exterminating certain peoples (the Jews from 1941-44, the Poles from 1943-44) and trying to win the support of others (the Baltic peoples) as collaborators. Official propaganda promised post war compensation in line with accomplishments for anyone aiding the German war efforts. There were many eager to seize the opportunity of a new career (mainly young people educated under the pre-war dictatorships of the Baltic States and the strong pre-war influences of Nazism), and the Germans were successful in their devisive tactics. The new recruits assisted the Nazi authorities in establishing administrative bodies necessary to the smooth functioning of the occupation.

2. The Germans had suffered badly during World War I from antagonism among conquered populations and undertook to prevent this in World War II. They formed a dual administrative set-up in Lithuania consisting of an able top echelon of high-level, professional German officials which set economic and political policy; and a lower echelon of Lithuanian administrators who carried out details of the policy and actively conducted economic (and some minor political) affairs. In addition, there was a military administration which was responsible for maintaining supply lines to the advancing lines of combat. The military authorities had little contact with the civilian population until 1943-44 when German forces began withdrawing before the Soviet counter offensive.

3. The Germans left the administrative divisions of Lithuania unchanged. The entire "ost-land" (all the conquered area east of Germany) was ruled by a Reichkommissariat headquartered in Riga. Each state was directed by a Generalkommissariat which divided responsibilities within each state among district (gebiet) commissioners and city commissioners. The Generalkommissar for Lithuania was von Renteln, whose headquarters were in Kaunas. District commissioners were located in Kaunas, Vilno, and Siauliai, and there were city commissioners in Kaunas and Vilno. A special branch of the German administration was responsible for the forest and wood economy of Lithuania.

4. In addition to the civil administration, the Germans maintained a Gestapo organization in Lithuania which received orders directly from Berlin and operated independently of the rest of the administration but in close coordination. A Gestapo officer directed the German as well as the native police. There was a continuous state of martial law and the police had unrestricted powers of life or death.

5. The Lithuanian branch of the administration was established in the Spring of 1942. Its members were extreme Lithuanian rightists. Each division had a German advisor who more or less took the place of the former communist advisors who held office under the Soviet occupation. In general, the Germans did not change the communist administrative system, except for appointing new officials. The rights granted by the communists to expropriated farm land were not revoked by the Germans but the peasants were still considered the users, not the owners of such land. This made the anticipated seizure and colonization of all the land a simpler procedure.

6. The monetary system was adjusted so that 10 rubles = 1 Reichsmark. This further drained money from the economy and intensified the poverty. A price schedule was fixed, farmers were forced to make heavy contributions in kind, and a ration system was introduced for food, clothes, and shoes. The Germans

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were unable to supply necessary quantities of vital goods and thus, available rationed goods were very scarce. Meats and fats were rarely available. The diet consisted of bread, potatoes, and some vegetables. After 1942, only bread was available. The farmers were paid by the Germans with promises to supply tobacco, clothing, and shoes. The few goods which were delivered to Lithuania disappeared among the officials charged with responsibility for their delivery. The black market boomed, and for huge prices or barter almost anything could be obtained.

7. Forced labor was enforced for everyone by employment centers in every county seat and the bigger cities. Surplus laborers were deported to Germany. In spite of bad treatment and scarce goods, however, the Lithuanians looked on the Germans as liberators. They were patient, hoping that the Germans would defeat the Soviets and then be defeated in turn.

B. The Forest Economy

1. The Forests

a. As said above, the Lithuanians' forest density decreased about one per cent as a result of the Soviet occupation. The Soviets completely deforested approximately an estimated 10,000 hectares, and another 5,000 hectares were clear or selectively logged. The forests were blocked with felled timber and the litter of logging operations, especially in those areas where the Red Army had been active.

b. Under German rule, the Lithuanian forestry administration made an attempt to encourage reforestation again. The total forest area, therefore, did not change very much, but mature timber was cut and the average age of the stands declined even more. Yield was established under the new conditions at 3,500,000 festmeters, or about 4 F.I.Y., a figure too high to be realistic. Production included 1,900,000 festmeters of live timber and 890,000 of dead wood or only 2,790,000 festmeters.

2. Property Relationships

During the occupation in 1943-44, some German colonization of Lithuania began. At this time some owners whose property had been expropriated but who had been permitted to remain on the land, were given their property back. The cases of this were rare, but served German propaganda designs aimed at keeping the Lithuanian population happy. Only Germans and Lithuanians had property returned under the plan and only when they had cooperated with the Germans by full tax and kind payments. The Germans hoped to encourage all Lithuanians to cooperate in hopes of receiving their property back after the war. No forest land was returned under the plan.

3. Forest Management

a. The place of the forestry administration in the occupation government was described above. The details of its structure did not differ significantly from the Soviet structure [see Chapter V, paragraph D, 5 (a) for availability of a chart of the Soviet Lithuanian Forestry Administration] except that titles were changed to German. The whole organization was a composite of the old Lithuanian Republic Forestry Department and the Soviet communist forestry authority. There were 45 persons of higher rank (34 professionally educated) in the central administration and 88 of lower rank (clerks, typists, bookkeepers, etc.) The local Administrative units were staffed by nine inspectors (forestry professionals), 49 forestmasters (34 professionally educated), 413 forest rangers (most with a technical forestry school background), and 2246 forest guards. Each forestmaster district had four to six timber collection points staffed by one to three men.

b. All employees but those working in the collection yards were civil service employees. The old regulations continued to apply to them. They were still divided into 20 categories and their salaries were still very similar to those paid in 1938; except that they were paid in Reichsmarks which by 1944

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had practically no value. Salaries of forestry officials continued to include supplements of land plus premiums of fuel wood, servants, drivers, automobiles (for forest inspectors), uniforms, footwear, and large quantities of cheap whiskey. The depreciation of currency and the opportunity of officials to profit from the timber production brought about a considerable corruption which included even the German advisors and demoralized the entire administration. The whiskey supply completed the demoralization.

c. An eight-hour day and six-day week were introduced. Production was increased and additional clerical manpower was hired. The staff itself was already too large, however, and had too little work to do. The system of control was reorganized on the German decentralized system under which local units had greater responsibility. Confidence within the local units increased, but so did corruption. Officials had no political duties; only technical and administrative responsibilities. German official interference in the local units was rare, although as production failed to come up to requirements, it increased. The Germans could not maintain the pressure, however, because of their own demoralization and the grave threat of Soviet paratroops. The paratroops dropped into the forest areas as early as Spring 1942, and forestry activities were the first to be disrupted by their presence.

d. The paratroop formations linked up with the splintered remnants of Soviet army formations which had moved into the forests rather than surrender to the Germans and with other fugitives (primarily Jews). These troops were aided by Russian ethnic groups and supplied with weapons by the paratroops. By early 1943, many forest master districts in the eastern Vilno area were under control of the irregular formations. By Spring 1944, almost all the larger forest ranges of Lithuania were occupied by Soviet groups which the Germans were powerless to control. Their presence put an effective end to any forestry program. The forestry officials were the first to be driven from their posts or killed, and the abandoned forests were open to anyone who dared to go into them for wood.

e. The Germans did not basically change the laws and regulations under which the forests were operated. These regulations were outmoded, but 25 years of experience had established a fairly effective practical system which operated in spite of them. The few circulars of instruction issued during the period were of a technical, not a fundamental nature.

4. Relationship Between the Germans and the Forestry Department

a. As said above, the Germans' prime objective to win the war resulted in their tolerant attitude toward the Baltic peoples. The latter's attitude toward the Germans was that they were the lesser of two evils but they came to realize that they had little to hope for under German rule. The Lithuanian Forestry Department had several objectives under the Germans:

(1) to forestall deportation of Lithuanians (only) to Germany as forced labor;

(2) to save the forests as much as possible;

(3) and to reforest as much as possible.

b. The Germans tried to split the active, Nationalist inclined Lithuanian Association and to win a group of young Lithuanians to them who would work for a "New Europe" under German domination. They would have been successful except for the worsening military situation. This factor caused even their most devoted advocates to moderate their support and modify their dreams to the concept of an independent Lithuanian Republic under western support and protection. The Germans talked of the advantages to accrue to Lithuania under a German victory, but all the while, the Lithuanian Association was looking for soft spots in the German administration by means of which it could temper the German demands on Lithuanian resources. One of these soft spots was the concern of the Germans for the welfare of their families in Germany. They could be bribed with

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foods (especially fats) and, as a result, the number of forced laborers and the amount of goods delivered to Germany grew smaller. Wood production declined under the guise of many excuses (lack of equipment, Soviet paratroops, etc.), and bribes. In 1942, production quotas were fulfilled about 90 per cent and transportation quotas 78-80 per cent; in 1943, production was only 60 per cent; and in 1944, about 40 per cent. By the summer of 1944, all forestry activities were halted by the confusion of the times.

c. The policy of the Lithuanians profited as the German policy failed. Production of wood above regular field declined and while the forests were overcut, the situation did not become too desperate.

5. Education, Research, Press

a. The German policy of suppressing education in conquered areas was eased in the Baltic states and even the universities finally reopened in Lithuania. Forestry instruction at the University of Vilno, though severely restricted, was handled by a faculty of 11 higher rank personnel (docents up), 12 lecturers, and 12 assistants, until the German withdrawal in the summer of 1944. Forty-five students graduated in Forestry during the period. The quality of the graduates was somewhat below the average of 1924-1928, because of the war and the policy of the university to stay open even if it had to lower its standards. The students of the period were all quite active in politics.

b. Under the Germans, an attempt was made to revive forestry research. A special research sub-division of the Forestry Department was set up, but no real work was ever accomplished. Research at Vilno University was more active but on an individual basis without support. No research reports were published.

c. The Forest Technical School, transferred from Alytus to Vilno, was active all through the period and remains open to the present. It had a steadily increasing student body and graduated 56 students in 1939, 73 in 1947, and 73 in 1943.(1) The increasing number of graduates indicated the interest of the Forestry Administration in developing a proper forest economy. Many of the graduates; however, took more lucrative positions in other branches of the administration. The technical graduates, like the university graduates, were not well prepared as the students of former years had been.

d. There was a greatly increased demand for forestry professionals, particularly in the wood industry, where the former directors, mainly Jews, had been removed by the Germans. The requirements for technicians were about twice what the schools could produce and the German and Lithuanian officials actively promoted technical education.

e. The ex-members of the communist-closed Lithuanian Foresters' Associations who were officials of the Forestry Department, began to reissue the magazine "Musu Girios." Approximately 3000 copies appeared on an irregular schedule every three to four months.

f. In general, the progress in forestry was slow. One obstacle was the general apathy of Lithuanian science. The Latvians, for example, were and are today much more active in science than the Lithuanians. Even under Soviet rule, the progress of science in Lithuania is slow.

6. Conservation

a. The German onslaught against the Soviets was so swift that there was almost no interim period of anarchy between the two governments and consequently, no period when wholesale timber thefts were possible. In 1944, when armed irregular groups held the forests, however, timber was taken in large quantities. The Vilno forests suffered most heavily because they were first occupied by the guerilla groups and contained the most valuable timber. It is probable that one "normal" year's crop of timber (3,500,000 festmeters) was stolen during the occupation period.(2)

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b. The Germans were concerned about the dangers of forest fire and increased the number of guards, especially in eastern Lithuania. There were no changes in the techniques of fighting fires, insects, fungi, etc.

7. Exploitation

a. Methods of exploitation did not change and were conducted according to existing plans. The clear-cut method was preferred but selective cutting and thinning became more important because timber was in short supply. The tools used did not change but iron and steel tools were very difficult to replace and the necessary supply was soon very limited. This factor enabled the peasants to avoid forestry work and each year more of them were able to claim exemption because they lacked tools. Every year more tools were imported from Germany, but most of them disappeared on the black market.

b. Annual production (set at 3,500 festmeters) was valued at 15 Reichsmarks per festmeter.(3) As said above, full production was never reached and annual production declined sharply each year.(4) Most logging activities were planned for the eastern forests but had to be transferred to Lithuania proper because of the greater resistance activity in the east. Toward the end of the occupation, the only wood taken was that in the most accessible areas including the city parks.(5) [See end of report for availability of a photograph of a park in Vilno showing the results of German logging operations.]

c. In 1943, when resistance groups became particularly strong, the military ordered strips 50 meters (later 100, 200 and even 500 meters) wide to be cleared on each side of main railway lines and highways. The timber was simply cut and in most cases was not hauled away. Under this program, 15,000 to 20,000 hectares of forest were cleared and overall forest density dropped about 1.5 to 2 per cent.

d. The German forces used 1,900,000 festmeters of wood in 1943, mainly of structural timber, pulp wood, and mine timber. Most of the 1,600,000 festmeters delivered to the population were consumed as fuel.(6) A great deal of spruce bark was produced for use in tanning leather in Vilno and Siauliai, and a small amount was exported to Germany.

8. Reforestation

Artificial reforestation gradually increased each year to a high of 12,000 hectares in 1943. Large sums were budgeted for the purpose but forced labor had to be used to get the work done since compensation was low (four to six Reichsmarks per day) and worthless and the supplements (fuel wood and little whiskey) were insufficient. The Forestry Department was very much interested in the program and managed to reseed or replant almost all the cut-over areas. The end result was poor, however, because the plots were not tended and most of the seedlings were choked out by hardier second growth of a soft deciduous type. The only significant investments in the forest during the period were in reforestation and exploitation. No new buildings were constructed.

C. The Wood Economy

1. Supply and Demand

a. Fuel wood was already in short supply before World War II and the wartime demands of the Soviets and then the Germans intensified the shortage. Structural timber was greatly needed, to rebuild towns and villages which were destroyed during the conflict, but was even scarcer. The wood shortage was not less acute in Germany itself, however; small German manufacturing shops using wood as a raw material got almost no supply unless they were making war goods,(7) and the same was true in Lithuania. Fuel was rationed in sufficient quantities to prepare foodstuffs and heat buildings slightly. Every family received a fuel wood ration, which it had to cut and transport itself. This was a particular hardship for the urban dwellers who sometimes had to get wood at distances of from 30 to 50 kilometers. When it was obtained, it was usually of very poor quality. The forestry

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officials and guards who supplied it were sometimes allied in corrupt combinations to attempt to profit from the distributions at the expense of the weaker elements of the population (especially the non-German, non-Lithuanian elements). The low fuel supply was one of the reasons for the high mortality rate, especially among city children during the hard winter of 1941-1942. The Lithuanian forestry officials were so much concerned with war production that they could not help their own population very much. Initially, fuel wood production was set at 1,000,000 festmeters annually. This was far too little and it was raised to 2,400,000 festmeters, still far short of enough.(8)

b. Structural wood could only be purchased by persons whose homes had been completely destroyed (to a total of 50 festmeters). The Forestry Department had anticipated such a situation early during the German occupation, however, and had sold the timber left by the Soviets to the population at low prices. This amounted to 600,000 - 700,000 festmeters and was the only substantial amount released from 1940-1944. Every higher forestry official (German and Lithuanian) down to and including forestmasters was entitled to sell a small amount of wood at fixed prices at his discretion. Most of this material was sold for bribes and diverted to the black market.

c. In 1941-1942, about 85 per cent of the German demand (1,600,000 festmeters) was produced and 80 per cent was delivered. In 1942-1943, these figures were 70 per cent and 50 per cent, and in 1943-1944, 50 per cent and 30 per cent. The Germans allocated their anticipated supply as follows:

Sawmills	200,000	festmeters
Pulp Wood	300,000	festmeters
Mine Timber	200,000	festmeters
Fuel Wood	1,400,000	festmeters
Ties	50,000	festmeters
Deciduous Logs	50,000	festmeters
Total	2,200,000	

All German production was exported. The only domestically consumed wood was fuel. Almost no lumber was available to the population. Although they used drastic measures and punishments to stimulate production, the Germans were unable to stimulate the collapsing wood economy and industry.

d. The wood assortments did not change significantly except that structural timber was formed according to German requirements.(9) Evergreen timber was formed, however, according to Lithuania specifications.

2. Labor and Wages

a. The Germans mobilized all possible resources for war, both at home and in conquered areas. They set fixed prices, wages, and work norms. The work norms were generally highest in Germany and so were the wages. Forced labor was introduced in Lithuania and failure to report for work was punished by deportation to Germany. The peasant farmers were left on their farms but were required to furnish transport and a very large proportion of their food production. No more than one extra man was permitted on a small farmstead, or two to three on the largest ones. The surplus laborers were moved to wherever [redacted] labor was needed, including Germany. A system of labor-book documentation was introduced under the supervision of the county employment bureaus. Many young peasants hid themselves early in the occupation to avoid deportation to Germany and later on, many hid to avoid conscription into the German auxiliary Armed Forces. As a result of these factors, the surplus of manpower quickly disappeared.

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b. The Forestry Department had workers assigned to it on a permanent basis. The workers were eager for assignment to the forests because it meant that they could stay in Lithuania. They worried little about the low wage rates, which were about 10 per cent beneath the German scale, or about 3.17 Reichsmarks per day. A piece-work system was used but a laborer could not earn over 10 per cent more than his normal eight-hour wage. Transport workers (with a horse and cart) earned 112 Reichsmarks a month in Germany and 100 Reichsmarks in Lithuania (4 Reichsmarks per day; 4.5 on a piece work basis).(10) Rafting workers earned about 50 per cent more than regular forest laborers, or about 4.75 Reichsmarks per day in Lithuania. During the period, while wages remained the same, prices on the black market rose 50 to 100 times. The workers remained at work, however, in order to avoid deportation. Production was low and most of the laborers had additional agricultural, black market, or theft operations. In addition, supplements in fuel and even structural wood were additions to their incomes. A worker at one time was permitted to buy one festmeter of structural wood for every 20 festmeters (later 15 and 12 festmeters) he produced. A festmeter of structural wood brought 200 to 300 Reichsmarks on the black market, and thus, the worker could raise his income two to three times. After 1943, the workers received an additional ration of 1 to 1.5 liters of cheap whiskey and the right to buy steel tools. Shoe leather and tobacco rations were also sometimes available.

c. In spite of all inducements and threats, production dropped 30 to 40 per cent and in some cases 50 to 60 per cent. A new class of people appeared who possessed worker's certificates which they had bought from corrupt officials. They did nothing at all. There were no strikes by the workers, but there was considerable communist activity and propaganda among them. In all there were 40,000 to 45,000 forest workers, about 25 per cent more than were normally employed. They worked a 48-hour week.

3. Transportation

a. Transportation was the weak spot in the forest economy under the German occupation. The transportation system of eastern Europe never was properly developed and under wartime demands, it was very inadequate. The peasants were forced to supply labor to transport wood not only to the edges of the forests, but from there to the shipping points. The transport "norms" were set by the Germans and were not very high (14 to 20 festmeters per farm), but were never fulfilled. At first, an average of 50 to 60 per cent of the quota was hauled but by 1943-1944 it had declined to 30 per cent. No inducements (threats, punishments, pay supplements) the Germans used could make the peasants fulfill their quotas. The release of some timber on the stump helped a little, but not enough.

b. During the occupation 600,000 to 800,000 festmeters of timber and pulpwood were available for transportation by railroad to points within Lithuania and to Germany, but only 50 to 60 per cent were actually transported. The system broke down because of the failure of deliveries of timber from the forests and the problems caused by the increasing resistance forces. Rafting was increased as a substitute for the railroads, but the only thing that kept the raftsmen working were the supplements they received and in spite of them they preferred industrial work in the cities. For example, they were paid three Kg of salt, two liters of kerosine, and one liter of whiskey to make up a raft of 100 festmeters of timber; and for delivery of the raft, three-four Kg of salt, two liters of kerosine, and one-two liters of whiskey. In addition, they were permitted to buy fuel wood, poor quality clothing, and rubber shoes.(12) The rafting quota for 1942 was 290,554 festmeters but only 164,278 (51 per cent) were delivered, 135,700 (71 per cent) in 1943. The increase in the percentage is an indication of the effectiveness of the supplements in inducing men to work.

c. Truck transport was negligible, although the forestry administration had more trucks than ever before as a result of the trucks left behind by the retreating Red Army. Gasoline was very scarce and most of the trucks ran on charcoal.

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4. Industry

a. The Germans did not alter the communist industrial system during the occupation, but converted all its output to war purposes. The lumber industry was particularly important to the Germans because it was best developed. They used the lumber mainly for barracks construction and for forms for pouring concrete, but the best was diverted to aircraft. Lithuanian industry was not badly damaged by the war because the German offensive overran the country in only a few days.

b. At the end of 1940, there were 207 wood enterprises with a total of 5564 workers and 20 paper enterprises with 1433 employees.(13) Of the 207 wood enterprises, there were in Spring 1944, 130 sawmills, of which 20 produced for export and industry and the rest served the needs of the population; 20 furniture manufacturers; nine other small wood products shops; one match plant (700 festmeters production); seven cardboard shops; four paper shops; and one plywood shop.

c. The Germans kept the wood industries under their control and independent of the Lithuanian puppet government. They paid higher wages than was the rule in other industries. Wood industry workers received 20 per cent more wages than forestry workers; regular rations; special clothing, shoes, fuel, salt, and lamp oil; and small quantities of their own production. The industry was always busy and some units worked two shifts. Production was high but quality declined. Normal utilization of the timber was 62-65 per cent, but under the Germans it rose to 70-75 per cent.(14) The reason for this was the German need for quantities of lumber for rough construction, rather than quality goods. Machinery and equipment which were worn out were in many cases, replaced and remodeled by the Germans. Annual net production of lumber was about 85,000 cubic meters. The scrap and litter of the production amounted to about 35,000 cubic meters. The match plant annually consumed 1000 festmeters of aspen; the paper industry 9000 festmeters of timber; the plywood industry 1000; and the furniture and other small shops about 5000. Overall consumption was about 250,000-280,000 festmeters per year. The value of this production was 20,000,000-22,000,000 Reichmarks.

5. Commerce

a. Commerce also continued to run on the system introduced by the communists. There was no private enterprise. What did exist operated under direction of the Germans on commission (7-10 per cent). Any profits they made were the result of graft or supplements to their monetary commission. They dealt on the black market to sustain themselves. In the forests, the Germans sometimes supplied prisoner (war or concentration camp) labor to these enterprises. In addition to the few private operators, there were many German wood industry representatives present to supervise wood production for war supply. They forced production by pressure rather than by supplements or graft.

b. All commercial transactions were handled through the Reichbank on account for the Generalcommissariat of Lithuania. All wood was sold at fixed prices which were sometimes raised, but never lowered. A price system similar to that of East Prussia remained in effect but prices were lowered to compensate for the greater distance from the German production cities. The German boundaries and other former international boundaries were closed to private commercial traffic. The formalities of border crossing were even stricter than they had been before the war, and the customs' rates remained the same.(15) In spite of legislation and threats, the black market boomed. 'Basic' items on which comparative prices were based were 100 Kg of rye and one liter of whiskey. Prices fluctuated as these two commodities did.

c. The supply of fuel wood was regulated by the Germans. Prices were fixed according to east Prussian standards (but 10-15 per cent lower).

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CHAPTER VI - FOOTNOTES

(1) "Musu Girios," Sept-Oct. 1943, p 64

(2) Author

(3) "Waldheil Kalendar", 1940 p 12,120

(4) Jameikis 1950, p 104

(5) Ibid

(6) "Musu Girois", 1943, p 26

(7) "Waldheil Kalendar", 1940

(8) "Musu Girois", 1943, p 26

(9) "Waldheil Kalendar", 1940, p 65

(10) "Waldheil Kalendar", 1940, p 40

(11) Author

(12) "Musu Girois", 1943

(13) Skerys, 1947, p 43-44. The figures include all small furniture, box, and barrel shops and the paper industries include printing shops and cigarette paper and filter manufacturers.

(14) Author

(15) "Waldheil Kalendar", 1940, p 139-140

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